



The Birth and Sacrifice of Isaac Genesis 21-23

Introduction

A. Review

Sodom and Gomorrah were grievously wicked cities which had sinned, testing God's mercy, justice and patience. God judged them for their depravity. Abraham's nephew, Lot, was rescued from destruction along with his wife and two unmarried daughters. However, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt when she disobediently took a backward glance at the wicked cities she called home. Later, Lot and his daughters shamefully committed incestuous sin, resulting in the birth of two sons who became the progenitors of Moab and Ammon, Israel's habitual enemies in later years.

B. The Seed

This week's lesson brings us to the fulfillment of the long-deferred promise of an heir for Abraham and Sarah, namely Isaac, the first seed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-2). Although the birth was a joyful occasion, it brought intense rivalry between Abraham's two offspring, Ishmael and Isaac, causing major turmoil in Abraham's family. It is important at this juncture to understand the Biblical difference between the different kinds of genealogical "seeds".

C. The Meaning of Seed

Seed, as a Biblical term, is the essential transmitting element which describes the descendants of a common ancestor. For example, Ishmael and Isaac were both the seed of Abraham. However, Dr. Tom Constable explains that there are four different categories of human seeds in the Bible (Adapted from Notes on Genesis):

- Natural Seed – This includes all of Abraham's physical descendants. (God promised "*all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" by Abraham's seed (12:1-3);
- Natural-Spiritual Seed - These are the physical descendants of Abraham who had the faith of Abraham ("*children of promise*" Romans 9:8);
- Spiritual Seed – These include all believers who are not physical descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9. 29);
- Ultimate Seed – These are the descendants of Abraham who are in the direct lineage of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16; Matthew 1:1-17).

OUTLINE of GENESIS 21-23

I. The Birth of Isaac - Genesis 21:1-8

II. Ishmael's Conflict and Separation - Genesis 21:9-21

III. Abraham and Abimelech - Genesis 21:22-34

IV. The Sacrifice of Isaac - Genesis 22:1-24

V. The Death of Sarah - Genesis 23:1-20

I. The Birth of Isaac - Genesis 21:1-8

A. Miraculous Conception - Genesis 21:1-2

After twenty-five years of hope and suspense, God fulfilled His words to Abraham. Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the natural-spiritual seed and son of promise. Miraculously, a 90-year old woman conceived and bore a son to a 100-year old man.

B. Laughter - Genesis 21:3-8

Interestingly, God appointed Isaac's name a year before he was born (Genesis 17:19). Abraham had laughed with joy when told about his heir (Genesis 17:17), Sarah responded with an initial laughter of unbelief (Genesis 18:15). Later, she believed the Lord. The name, Isaac, means "laughter" and reflects the joyous faith of both parents. Sarah declared that the name also reflects the holy joy of all who empathize with Sarah's unexpected good fortune, "*all who hear will laugh with me*".

II. Ishmael's Conflict and Separation - Genesis 21:9-21

A. Jealousy and Envy of Ishmael - Genesis 21:9-10

Abraham's first son, Ishmael, had been the recipient of all of Abraham's love and affection for thirteen years, until Isaac was born. He had been confident that he would inherit the great wealth and power of his father. His expectations and hopes were shattered, however, as Isaac grew older and was clearly the heir of promise. Ishmael became jealous and began mocking and ridiculing his half-brother. Sarah perceived Ishmael's true nature and demanded that Abraham remove Hagar and Ishmael from their household. She wisely feared that they were unable to appreciate the spiritual hope known to Abraham's tribe, namely the hope of a coming Savior.

B. Abraham Sends Hagar and Ishmael Away - Genesis 21:11-14

Sarah's demand was very disappointing to Abraham who loved both of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. But God commanded Abraham to listen to Sarah, knowing that Isaac was the seed of promise. (Note that Ishmael was Abraham's natural seed whereas Isaac was his natural-spiritual seed).

Sarah's demand was based on the divorce laws of the ancient Near East which stipulated that a father may grant freedom to the slave woman and children she has borne him in which case they forfeit their share of personal property. So Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness, trusting that God would care for them.

C. God Rescues Hagar and Ishmael - Genesis 21:15-21

Hagar and Ishmael faced another "lost-in-the wilderness" experience (as they had in Chapter 16). Alone in the desert, Hagar and Ishmael soon used up the water Abraham had given them. Hagar's heart was heavy at the thought of watching her son die. She sat him down under a bush and then went some distance from him and "*lifted up her voice and wept*". It is interesting that the Scriptures record that God heard the voice of Ishmael. It is not stated that Ishmael cried out to God, but apparently his scoffing turned to a humble cry for help when he was faced with death from thirst. God sent His angel to comfort Hagar with the promise that Ishmael would become a great nation (see Genesis 25:12-16). He then provided water from a well.

Sometime later, Hagar "*took a wife for him from the land of Egypt*". Dr. Constable (Notes on Genesis) points out that from Ishmael's sons came the Arab nations that have ever since been the chief antagonists of the Israelites.

III. Abraham and Abimelech - Genesis 21:22-34

A. The Problem - Genesis 21:22-26

Abraham had previously sojourned near Gerar at which time Abimelech had offered Abraham his choice of land for a dwelling place (Genesis 20:15). Abraham had dug a well in the plot of land he had chosen. But unbeknown to Abimelech, his own servants had seized Abraham's well by force. Because he recognized that Abraham had become a prominent, influential man who walked with God, Abimelech was anxious to retain his good will so he arranged a meeting with Abraham.

B. The Solution - Genesis - 21:27-34

Abraham and Abimelech both knew that control of valuable water sources was necessary in that dry and thirsty land. Abimelech wanted to permanently secure the friendly relations that had begun to exist between his own people and those of Abraham. Abraham's motivation was the desire to settle on a small part of the land God had promised him. Neither one wanted to fight over the matter of the well, so they made a covenant of peaceful coexistence. This is a remarkable example of Abraham's relationship with God and Abimelech's faith in the future existence of Abraham's descendants. It is all the more impressive when we consider that Abimelech was a Gentile king over the land of the Philistines.

IV. The Sacrifice of Isaac - Genesis 22:1-24

A. The Challenge - Genesis 22:1-2

This is an amazing account of God commanding a human sacrifice and Abraham intending to obey it. God's command that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac was truly the supreme test of his faith and obedience. It was not a temptation to evil, but a challenge to trust and depend on an infinitely perfect God who does not make mistakes. God later prohibited human sacrifice in the Mosaic law. The only human sacrifice He ever required was that of His own Son for the propitiation (satisfaction) of our sins.

B. Abraham's Response - Genesis 22: 3-4

God's command to kill and burn his son, Isaac, caused an agonizing struggle in Abraham's heart. Isaac was his heir – the son of promise – the seed descendent in whom the covenant with God would be moved forward. And now, God instructed Abraham to take Isaac to Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. He loved the boy dearly as his most cherished earthly possession. But he loved God even more. So, he rose up the next morning to make necessary preparations for the sacrifice. He took Isaac, some split wood and two other young men. They set out for Moriah about forty-five miles away.

C. Abraham's Confidence - Genesis 22:5-6

After traveling three days, Abraham instructed the young men who had accompanied them to, "*Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.*" Abraham's confidence that his son would return with him from the place of sacrifice was remarkable. His certainty is ascribed in the New Testament as an explicit belief in resurrection after Isaac's death (Hebrews 11:17-19).

D. The Perplexity of Isaac - Genesis 22:7-9

Father and son proceeded to the place of sacrifice and Isaac asked, *"Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* Abraham assured him that God would provide a lamb. The father's unqualified faith became the son's cooperative faith and he submitted to his father's will. As H. C. Leupold explains, "Isaac suffered himself to be bound as an act of supreme faith in God and of full confidence in his father." Abraham bound and placed Isaac on the altar. Bear in mind that Isaac, at 18-20 years of age at this time, and could have rebelled and wrestled freedom from his old father (The Biblical Expositor, Volume I).

E. The Angel of the Lord - Genesis 22:10-14

Abraham raised the knife to kill his son but was stopped by the voice of the Angel of the Lord. God knew that Abraham had surrendered his heart and that nothing could stand between them. Abraham's willingness to carry out the planned sacrifice of Isaac was the full evidence that God desired to clearly reveal Abraham's inner spiritual surrender. God honored Abraham's courageous confidence and supreme act of obedience by providing a ram in a nearby thicket. Once again the Angel of the Lord – the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ – had intervened in the life of Abraham to lead and encourage him as the foundation stone of the covenant. Abraham named the place, *"The Lord Will Provide"* (Yahweh Yireh).

Application.

Are you experiencing a heart-wrenching trial in your life that causes you to wonder about God's promises? Do sleepless nights turn into difficult days and anxious thoughts hang on even though you pray earnestly? Patience and trust are sometimes learned through extremely tough trials. Remember that God is your stronghold. He is the perfect Provider of all your needs.

"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Memorize Psalm 62:5-6: *"My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved."*

F. The Covenant Reaffirmed -
Genesis 22:15-24

In recognition of Abraham's unparalleled act of faith, the Lord emphatically swore an oath by Himself as

a guarantee to Abraham that He would carry out the promised blessings of the Covenant. The historical execution of this remarkable statement is conditioned on obedience. Only those who continue in the faith of Abraham may look to the possession of these promises.

The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the descendants of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The main persons mentioned are Bethuel and his daughter Rebekah, who figure prominently in Isaac's adult life.

V. The Death of Sarah - Genesis 23:1-20

A. A Woman of Faith - Genesis 23:1-2

Sarah died in Hebron in the land of Canaan and is commended in Hebrews Chapter 11, the Hall of Faith chapter of the New Testament, for her trust in God: *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised"* (Hebrews 11:11). She is the only woman whose age at death is reported in Scriptures, a significant indication of her importance.

B. Abraham's Need for a Burial Site -
Genesis 23:3-6

Abraham was a devoted and loving husband and he felt the loss of Sarah keenly. The rule of the land was that the dead must be buried within one day's time after death. So Abraham spoke directly and sincerely to the sons of Heth (Hittites) who possessed the city and its surrounding territory. He requested that they sell him property for the burial of his dead. They offered the choicest of their burial places.

C. The Cave of Machpelah - Genesis 23:7-16

Abraham desired to buy Ephron's field containing the cave of Machpelah. It was the official custom in the ancient Mideast to negotiate such business transactions at the "gate of the city". Prominent people gathered there to be witnesses as well as a kind of court and jury. Sometimes there was haggling and dickering between the two parties to drive a shrewd bargain. This was commonly enjoyed by both sides as sort of a competition. This was not the case with Abraham who would rather have Ephron take advantage of him than argue over price. Abraham showed that he was a God-fearing man standing on higher ground than the conventional heathen man. He bought the land for an unusually high price of four hundred shekels.

D. Significance of the Field and Cave -
Genesis 23:17-20

Abraham's possession of the field in Canaan, not far from his residence in Mamre, marked the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant. Abraham finally owned a small plot of real estate in the land God had promised to him and his descendants.

Sarah was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Later, Abraham (Genesis 25:9), Isaac (Genesis 35:29), Rebekah and Leah (Genesis 49:31) and Jacob (Genesis 50:13) all would be buried there. The possession of this grave was, in due time, a stimulus for the Israelites to take full possession of the land of Canaan promised to them years ago.

Application

Hebrews 11:1 states that faith "*is the substance of things hoped for, the confidence of things not seen*" (wording from margin notes of New King James Version). After long years of waiting, not always patiently but always with confidence, Abraham began to realize the fruits of his faith. Sarah's faith had resulted in the miracle of a longed for baby in her old age. Abraham and Sarah went forward in their lives each day with the hope of the fulfillment of God's promises. Do you demonstrate this same hope in your life? In what ways?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read Notes and References.

1. What difficulty developed between Isaac and Ishmael?
2. What was the challenge for Abraham in God's commanding him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering?
3. What certainty did Abraham have that gave him confidence Isaac would return with him?
4. What is the significance of Abraham's gaining possession of the field and cave Machpelah?

DAY TWO: Read Genesis 24:1-21; Acts 7:2.

5. What covenant did Abraham make with his oldest servant?
6. What were Abraham's specific directions to his servant concerning where to go?
7. Describe the essence of the servant's prayer.
8. What happened following the servant's prayer?

DAY THREE: Read Genesis 24:22-41.

9. Judging from God's response through Rebekah's actions, would you say that the servant's prayers were answered? Explain your answer.
10. Abraham had told his servant in 24:7, that God's angel would have oversight of his mission. What did the servant do after Rebekah identified herself?
11. a. Who was Rebekah's grandmother? See also Genesis 22:23. _____
b. Who was her brother? _____
c. What impressed her brother about Isaac?

DAY FOUR: Read Genesis 24:42-67.

12. a. How did Rebekah's father and brother respond to the servant's explanation of his purpose?
- b. What request did Rebekah's brother and mother make the following morning when the servant was ready to leave?
13. What indicates that Rebekah wanted to get on with her life?
14. What happened when Rebekah and Isaac saw each other the first time?

DAY FIVE: Read Genesis 25:1-18; 21:18.

15. a. How old was Abraham when he died? _____
- b. Who buried him? _____
- c. Where was he buried? _____
16. a. How many sons did Ishmael have? _____
- b. What had God promised Hagar in 21:18?
- c. What did the sons become in their nations?
17. To whom did Abraham leave his major inheritance assets and to whom did he give lesser gifts?

DAY SIX: Read Genesis 25:19-34.

18. What did the Lord tell Rebekah about her pregnancy?
19. a. In what order were Rebekah's twins delivered?
- b. How were they described at that time and as they grew older?
20. Describe Esau's selling of his birthright to Jacob.